Forsythe II Project

Summary of Public Scoping Input and U.S. Forest Service Response

December 2015

Comment 1:

Burning is not appropriate because of adjacent private property; for drinking water risk, will only burning east of CR359 be sufficient instead of including areas west of this road

Response:

The broadcast burn would be done using techniques for low severity burning and conducted only when conditions allow for a controlled burn based on the burn plan. A burn plan is developed prior to prescribed burning to provide management direction. Prescribed burns are beneficial to reduce fuels, stimulate new vegetation growth. In the long term, this can improves forage for wildlife and can reduce the risk of erosion in the long term.

Comment 2:

Slash piles still not burned and noxious weeds not treated (when treating would like to see chemicals used that aren't toxic to bees); can landowners remove piles if within 300 feet of property or structure; areas of lop and scatter must be cleaned up; need to take care of backlog of piles before creating new ones

Response:

Slash disposal, through burning, chipping, or removal is a component of fuel reduction activities. The Forest Service is aware of the concern in the slash piles need of disposal. We will continue to dispose of piles when conditions are adequate for burning. Additionally, chipping is an option we have used in areas difficult to burn.

Slash piles must cure for a minimum of a year before they can be burned, therefore, as we are implementing forest management activities, there would always be some slash across the landscape. This project would create more piles and would ideally be disposed of 1-3 years after constructed.

The only areas that would have lopped and scattered material, occur within a broadcast burn unit. This is to help carry fire over the area when it is burned because the area would be burned when fuel moistures are higher for better control. The U.S. Forest Service prioritizes weed treatment annually. The Forsythe II project would incorporate methods to reduce the spread of weeds in areas treated.

Comment 3:

Support project but would like to see 'mid-growth' ponderosa pine and other mature firs left intact and not cut. Would also like to see an emergency escape road near the east end of Big Springs.

Response:

The December 2015 Proposed Action would allow for cutting of mixed conifer species up to 16 inches DBH, however, this does not mean all trees under 16 inches DBH would be cut. Additionally, the proposed action includes two options for an emergency egress route out of the Big Springs Subdivision.

Comment 4:

Proposed actions are contradictory to Forest Plan; most of project is in Management Area 3.5.

Response:

Since the September 2015 proposal, the proposed action was further refined with input from U.S. Forest Service resource specialists, including a U.S. Forest Service Wildlife Biologist. Additional field

verification was conducted during this time. Adjustments have been made between the proposal and the December 2015 Proposed Action as a result.

Comment 5:

Science presented to FS casts doubt on validity of science the FS is using; need to use most current science

Response:

The U.S. Forest Service uses current science available to provide guidance for treatment. A bibliography is available at the project website, and will be updated to include all references used in project development and analysis.

Comment 6:

Proposal same as first project justified for different reasons (i.e. forest health vs. MPB); sanitation needs to be removed from the proposal as those trees are used by different wildlife species

Response:

The U.S. Forest Service requested input on our proposal both externally from the public and internally from U.S. Forest Service resource specialists. Input received during the scoping process was used to refine the Proposed Action. The December 2015 Proposed Action removes sanitation as a treatment option and adjusted treatment to be more beneficial to wildlife.

Comment 7:

Lack detail in our proposal; should include likely task orders ;need to outline on a map where watershed BMPs will occur; need to study the area more to get a better idea of what needs to be done; what treatment method will occur where (hand vs. mechanical; treatment prescription – what will be done where); need to include marking in the write up of this proposal so people can follow up to make sure it is happening as was described; too many cutting options in the 'brown colored' areas

Response:

In an effort to include the public early and often, in project development, the Forest Service initiated scoping on the proposal to request input from the public. The 2015 Proposed Action was developed from that input and that of Forest Service Specialists. The 2015 Proposed Action provides more detail about proposed treatments and includes draft Design Criteria. Additional field verification has occurred and provided updated vegetation information across the project area. Some examples of detail includes the addition of individual tree marking (to designate which trees are to be cut or left) within mixed conifer stands December 2015 Proposed Action and lodgepole pine treatments were separated into individual treatments; they are now identified as either patchcut/clearcut or regeneration thin.

Comment 8:

Like that the proposed action is incorporating more natural looking clumps of trees; why only leave 2-12 trees per clump, why not more

Response:

With the addition of a diameter cut limit in the December 2015 Proposed Action, the size of the clumps may increase.

Comment 9:

Surface fuels not being treated; remove surface and ladder fuels, leaving large trees; don't cut on north facing slopes

Response:

The best way to treat surface fuels is through broadcast burning, however this cannot be done everywhere throughout the project area. The area west of Gross Reservoir allows for treatment of surface fuels. The December 2015 Proposed Action includes management activities that remove ladder fuels and leave trees 16 inches DBH and greater across the mixed conifer treatment units. Management activities are proposed on north facing slopes in the December 2015 Proposed Action.

Comment 10:

Where clearcutting has been done, it's been so extreme that there is no diversity in the forest and risk of ground fire spread has increased

Response:

Areas previously clearcut have been identified in the December 2015 Proposed Action for regeneration thinning. Opening the canopy of a dense stand of lodgepole, often allows an opportunity for the understory vegetation to grow. This provides diversity in the stand and forage for wildlife. While some believe that is can increase wind speeds, the reduction in fuels after log and slash removal allows for increased success in fire suppression. These issues will be addressed in the environmental analysis.

Comment 11:

Already quite a bit of open space (from previous FS work, driveways, roads, fuels mitigation done on private property) so no need for any more treatment up in the high country

Response:

This will be addressed in the environmental analysis.

Comment 12:

No need to cut trees, especially large ones, to accommodate aspen or achieve any of the other objectives the FS says this project will meet; need to evaluate areas where FS plans to expand aspen by cutting around aspen clones to ensure the right conditions (soil moisture) exist to actually achieve this goal

Response:

In areas designated as aspen restoration in the December 2015 Proposed Action, all conifers up to 16 inches DBH may be cut within and up to 50 feet of the edge of the aspen clone. This treatment would increase the vigor of the aspen clone.

Comment 13:

The proposal will cause fires to spread more rapidly, effect the wildlife, and cause erosion because of the lack of trees; should thin by hand as homeowners are required to do

Response:

Removing trees could increase wind speeds, however, the removal of ladder fuels and increased space between crowns would reduce the ability of a wildfire to become sustained crown fires. The December 2015 Proposed Action would reduce trees in a treatment area but would not treat the understory components such as grasses, forbs, and brush. The potential for erosion would be greater without treatment if a wildfire were to occur across the area. Treatments could be done either manually or mechanically based on slope.

These issues will be addressed in the environmental analysis.

Comment 14:

Don't want clearcuts would rather see commercial thinning instead; remove non-snag dead downed trees where they are dense; don't thin mature healthy conifers; don't believe you can't thin in lodgepole because of windthrow issues; instead of heavy thinning and clearcuts, reduce ladder fuels and prune trees

Response:

The proposed clearcuts/patchcuts would provide for a diversity of age classes across the project area that thinning could not achieve. The proposed action also includes reducing ladder fuels and within the defensible space areas, pruning could be done.

Comment 15:

Concerned finished results aren't what was proposed and never completed

Response:

The December 2015 Proposed Action includes specific treatment activities which would result in on the ground treatment as prescribed in the proposed action. The proposed treatments could take several years to complete.

Comment 16:

Impacts on wildlife survival and migration patterns; which wildlife species will this project benefit; is there a certain species that is suffering in this area for which this project will help; has FS monitored and inventoried migratory species as required by Migratory Bird Treaty

Response:

The December 2015 Proposed Action was prepared in consultation with the U.S. Forest Service Wildlife Biologist and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The treatments would benefit several wildlife species including birds, elk, and deer to name a few. The Migratory Bird Treaty would be included in the analysis of the December 2015 Proposed Action.

Comment 17:

Roads aren't effectively closed after treatment. There are many areas where biking and motorized use occur on logging access roads.

Response:

There are standards the Forest Service uses to decommission roads. Although these standards are supposed to be stringent enough to keep unauthorized use from on those decommissioned roads, sometimes people are determined to keep an area open for their own use.

Comment 18:

Why is the FS planning treatment around Gross Reservoir with the proposed expansion; how will campsites, trails, and roads be affected by treatment there; need to consider Gross Reservoir expansion

Response:

Treatments are planned around Gross Reservoir to reduce the effect of a wildfire to the water source. Campsites and authorized trails would not be affected by the proposed treatment except for in times when treatment is occurring. The expansion of Gross Reservoir would be analyzed in the Environmental Assessment for this project.

Comment 19:

Need to consider social trails and impacts to residents; proposal may affect property values; need to include social science and aesthetics

Response:

This issue will be addressed in the environmental analysis.

Comment 20:

Confusion with primary and secondary burn area; why is FS burning same area burned 10-15 years ago

Response:

As a result of the confusion with secondary burn areas, the secondary burn area has been removed from the December 2015 Proposed Action. The broadcast burning would only occur within the proposed burn units. Not all the area proposed for broadcast burning in the Winiger Ridge project was burned. There were approximately 400 acres burned in the Winiger Ridge project.

Comment 21:

How will defensible space proposal be implemented; don't think 300 feet is needed (should only be up to 100 feet), it will decrease buffer between property owners

Response:

The defensible space would be permitted to homeowners who request to perform defensible space and their homes are within 300 feet from the National Forest boundary. The work would be completed by the homeowners after receiving a permit from the Forest Service. Not all homeowners will elect to treat the entire 300 feet but it allows them to do so. This is further described in the December 2015 Proposed Action.

Comment 22:

Unit 2 – can defensible space prescription be done instead of clearcutting; recommend only defensible space, remove dead trees on ground and leaning against other trees, and thin previously treated lodgepole patches

Response:

Unit 2 consists of lodgepole pine and management prescribed would be patchcut/clearcut to increase age diversity. The areas previously patchcut/clearcut are included in the December 2015 Proposed Action for regeneration thinning. An alternative to the December 2015 Proposed Action may include reduced amounts or areas of patch cut/clear cut in some of the lodgepole stands.

Comment 23:

Can FS include future maintenance of areas treated in this project (i.e. thinning lodgepole regen where clearcut and additional prescribed burning)

Response:

Fuels reduction management includes a component of maintenance of the areas previously treated. Additional forest management would be needed to maintain the areas where work has been done. Future management activities may include thinning lodgepole regeneration, prescribed burning, or additional thinning or patch cuts. Additional analysis would be conducted at that time.

Comment 24:

Unit 43 – already thinned, why thin again

Response:

Forest management varies in intensity from a leave alone natural situation (i.e. Wilderness areas) to a highly intensive regime with silvicultural interventions in order to meet specific objectives. A thinned stand from a previous entry is just one disturbance in the stand's overall history. Previous disturbances (ie. fire, wind, artificial thinning) have all combined and contributed to the stand's existing condition. Because a stand (unit) has been treated in the past doesn't remove it from future forest management.

Comment 25:

Unit 42 – don't do any work in this unit

Response:

December 2015 Proposed Action may include reduced amounts or areas of patch cut/clear cut in some of the lodgepole stands.

Comment 26:

Support work around Pinecliffe (Units 26-29, 43, 47, 61, and 62)

Response:

Thank you for your comment.

Comment 27:

Per sample mark in mixed conifer, it appeared all LP regardless of size would be removed. Why turn a mixed conifer stand into a pure ponderosa pine stand? Too many trees would be removed.

Response:

Areas of lodgepole pine, ½ acre to 5 acres in size, which occur within a mixed conifer stand, could be treated as a patchcut/clearcut. The mixed conifer stands basal area would be reduced by 40%, 30% in old growth areas. The mixed conifer stands consist of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and lodgepole pine. Basal area would be reduced by thinning all species, up to 16 inches DBH, within the mixed conifer stands so that a mixture of species would be retained.

Comment 28:

A portion of Unit 52 acts as buffer to private property and public interactions, would like to see this area left uncut. Area outlined in Unit 52 was cut 12 years ago and now old ponderosa are left, why cut those down?

Response:

There are some older ponderosa pine trees in this unit and though it was lightly thinned 12 years ago, the existing basal area is high especially in proximity to private residences.

Comment 29:

Unit 53 was cut already and now has aspen growing in, what is left to accomplish in this unit; should be left untreated

Response:

One of the objectives of this project is to reduce conifers within aspen stands. Aspen clones alter fire behavior during a wildfire event. Cutting the conifers would reduce the perpetuation of conifers in this aspen clone by eliminating the seed source. This action would also set back succession in an environment absent of reoccurring fire.

Comment 30:

A small portion of Unit 54 acts as buffer to Mag Rd. and private property, consists of ponderosa and aspen, would prefer no cutting here.

Response:

Vegetation buffers to roads provide audial and visual screens to private residences. Maintaining dense vegetation adjacent to roads that may be utilized for ingress/egress during a wildland fire suppression effort poses a hazard to private residences and emergency responding units under certain conditions. Depending on the size and location of the suggested area, this will be considered in the environmental analysis.

Comment 31:

Request clearcutting on FS lands behind houses on Jennie Lane off of Highway 72.

Response:

Areas north of Jennie Lane were treated in 2014 under the 2012 Forsythe Decision where treatment could occur. Areas not treated were too steep for treatment.

Comment 32:

Support proposed work in Units 43, 45, and 47 and hope it can be done soon.

Response:

Thank you for your comment.

Comment 33:

Treatment outlined is not appropriate for elevation; most of project is in upper montane forest not lower montane; upper montane forests should be denser not thinned as proposed.

Response:

The December 2015 Proposed Action changes the amount of basal area reduced in the mixed conifer stands. The December 2015 Proposed Action allows for up to 40% basal area reduction, up to 30% in old growth areas. Additionally, management activities can vary greatly in amount and extent across Lower and Upper montane forest when it is part of the Wildland Urban Interface. Management may not be same as what would be designed for these forests outside of the WUI. The entire Forsythe II project area is considered WUI.

Comment 34:

How can FS predict what may happen with climate change and use that as basis for proposed treatments?

Response:

The Forest Service uses the best available science about climate change to propose treatments.

Comment 35:

Will reducing the density decrease the risk of fire or improve forest resilience?

Response:

Reducing the density would reduce the effects of a wildfire, not the risk of a wildfire. Reducing density would allow for the remaining trees to grow more vigorously leading to their ability to resist future disturbances. Additionally, if a wildfire were to burn through an area that had been thinning, the fire not

burn as hot or drop from the tree crowns to the ground, which would lead to a greater tree survival. This issue will be address in the environmental analysis.

Comment 36:

Don't cut conifers out of aspen groves, if it has to be done don't do it mechanically; large conifers within aspen stands indicate that aspen are encroaching on the conifers instead of the other way around

Response:

By removing conifers, up to 16 inches DBH, from the aspen clone, it increases the ability of that clone to grow. Aspen stands are important to wildlife species and can reduce the effects of a wildfire as they are generally wetter.

Comment 37:

Is there data that shows more acreage of meadows/aspen having occurred in the past; there's no reason to take out large conifers in meadows; burning in meadows would be better way to enhance them

Response:

By removing conifers from the meadows, it increases the viability of the meadow. While burning would enhance these meadows, unfortunately these areas are not located in areas where broadcast burning could occur. Research studies have shown that historical openings including meadows have declined in size due to encroaching conifers in the absence of fire. Removing conifers in meadows slows the encroachment of conifers into these areas because the seed source is removed.

Comment 38:

Don't cut on knolls

Response:

Ridge tops and hill tops may not be suitable for forest management due to steepness or the rocky ground. This is determined when the area is being laid out and marked for management.

Comment 39:

What efforts are being taken to preserve the historic fence line in Unit 43 and 68, it dates back to when the area was homesteaded and the original land patent granted

Response:

Impacts to heritage resources will be addressed in the environmental analysis.

Comment 40:

What steps will be taken to protect private land owners from the trespassing the project creates

Response:

This is outside the scope of this project and analysis. Private land owners have the responsibility to protect their private property.

Comment 41:

Would like an objective of this project to enhance recreation activities as it overlaps with Magnolia Trails project

Response:

This is outside the scope of this project. Information on the Magnolia Trails Environmental Assessment can be found on the Arapaho and Roosevelt NF and Pawnee National Grassland website (http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/arp/home).

Comment 42:

How are target density reductions determined, don't think the 50% basal area reduction will get the desired result; how will new aspen patches be created, considering challenges with drought cycles and elk browsing – it seems conifer removal by itself would be a difficult and inefficient way to maintain aspen; 80% clearcut in lodgepole is too much, maybe 30-50% instead; no cut buffers near private lands between clearcuts and smaller units

Response:

Aspen clones that have conifers within them would benefit from the removal of the conifers. Conifers continue to drop seed that promotes conifer regeneration and overtime converts the aspen stand into a conifer stand. Aspen clones have been encroached by surrounding conifer stands and have been reduced in both size and extent due to an expanding wildland urban environment and the absence of fire across the Front Range. Cutting out the seed source emulates a fire disturbance as a safer alternative and sets back the succession process in a heavily populated landscape. The December 2015 Proposed Action would allow for up to 50% of a lodgepole unit to be clearcut/patchcut. Treatment units would be reviewed by the Forest Service landscape architect to ensure they meet visual requirements.

Comment 43:

Need to follow through with monitoring during and after implementation

Response:

Project monitoring, during and after, is an important component of the project implementation. It is included in the project design criteria.

Comment 44:

Units 56 and 72 – get rid of weeds, thin and remove understory lodgepole, should be manually treated, plan to retreat in 10 years to thin/remove regen

Response:

Treatment for Unit 56 in the December 2015 Proposed Action is aspen restoration. Conifers would be removed from the aspen clone. Unit 72 would have the basal area reduced by up to 40%. Either unit could be treated manually or mechanically. Weeds would be treated as needed.

Comment 45:

Unit 57 – actually mixed conifer not lodgepole and should be left uncut for wildlife

Response:

Based on field verification, this unit was determined to be dominated with lodgepole pine.